SOAR in ACTION

USW@Work

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SOAR CONTINUES TO GROW IN DISTRICT 12

Denver, Colo.— On October 17, 2013 United Steelworkers District 12, in conjunction with SOAR Chapter 12-1, sponsored a luncheon for retirees from the Greater Denver, Colorado area. The meeting provided an opportunity for those who attended to learn about our retiree organization and to get an update on the implantation of the Affordable Care Act. Among the invited guests were Dr. Irene Aguilar, the Assistant Majority Leader of the Colorado State Senate, SOAR International President Bill Pienta and Jerry Hardin, retired president of USW Local 8031.

David Nefzger, chapter president coordinated the gathering and kicked off the event. He welcomed the retirees to the luncheon, reviewed recent chapter activities and urged those who were not yet members to join.

Dr. Irene Aguilar, the Assistant Majority Leader of the Colorado State Senate explained the importance of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). She discussed because of this new law, “Health insurance is now more affordable, and millions of Americans now have access that they didn’t before.” She stated that, “This law addresses inequities in health care and increases access to quality, affordable health coverage, invests in prevention and wellness, and gives individuals and families more control over their health care needs.” Dr. Aguilar explained how Colorado is implementing the ACA and discussed additional health care initiatives the state legislators are working on. She also took questions from those in attendance and addressed the many myths and fallacies associated with the act that have been spread through various media outlets.

Dr. Irene Aguilar the Assistant Majority Leader of the Colorado State Senate.

SOAR International President Bill Pienta addressed the gathering on the importance of staying politically active. He explained the important role SOAR plays within our union. He reminded the group that retirees are under constant attack by the far right in Washington; “Social Security and Medicare are once again in their sights, we need to stand together to stop this assault and fight to improve these two vital programs, not stand idly by and watch them be destroyed!” Bill went on to say: “SOAR was created to provide retirees a voice for these battles; there is strength in numbers. The bigger we become the louder our voices are heard on the issues that are important to all of us in this room.” We need you to join SOAR and be active members of our retiree organization.”

SOAR President Bill Pienta.

The group also heard from Jerry Hardin, retired president of USW Local 8031 that represented members who worked at the decommissioned Rocky Flats nuclear weapons facility. Jerry updated them on the status of the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program Act. This program was established to compensate sick nuclear weapons workers and certain survivors who now suffer from their workplace exposures.

A special thanks to Robert LaVenture, USW District 12 Director for sponsoring the event.

BILL PIENTA
SOAR President

Why Seniors Should Care About the Minimum Wage

I recently had a conversation regarding the federal minimum wage and a person told me that an increase in the wage would impact me by increasing the cost of goods I may purchase. So, I decided to do a little math to see if there was a benefit for me, if the federal minimum wage increased to $10 per hour from the present $7.25.

Of the estimated 75.3 million workers in the U.S., 3.53 million of them receive the minimum wage. I realize all of them do not work 40 hours per week, but for the sake of this discussion, let's assume they do.

If you are a senior who holds one of these minimum wage jobs, the benefit is obvious. For others, a $10 minimum wage represents an additional $13.64 weekly joint contribution to the Social Security Trust Fund. Multiply that number by 52 weeks, times the number of minimum wage workers and I can find $2.5 billion reasons annually why seniors should be pushing for an increase in the minimum wage.

The purpose of this message is not to make seniors look greedy but to show how issues that we may think have no direct impact on us really do. We are all in this together; whether we realize it or not. Minimum wage, trade agreements, balancing federal budgets and many other issues impact ALL of us, some directly and some indirectly. Seniors must get involved and stay involved.

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

JIM CENTNER
SOAR Director

Thought the Budget Crisis was Over? Guess Again!

If you thought the budget crisis was over when both parties in Congress inked a two-year budget agreement in December, guess again. President Obama and Congress are once again preparing to plunge into another battle over the debt ceiling. Due to October's government shutdown, Congress needs to act on an increase in the borrowing limit far sooner than expected.

Shortly after the agreement was struck in December, those in the know predicted we would be in good shape until mid-summer. Unfortunately, it now appears that the Treasury will run out of money in mid-March and will once again be unable to pay its bills. That means Capitol Hill could spend the start of the year in the same place it spent much of the last; trading partisan fire over debts and deficits.

This constant fighting in Congress over meeting our nation's financial obligations is getting old. Congress needs to realize that the bills must be paid. So much time is spent bickering over the budget that nothing else seems to get done.

It has been over a year since the 113th Congress was seated. In that time, not one piece of legislation has been passed to address the jobs crisis in America. Congress has refused extend unemployment benefits for the long-term unemployed, yet they won't pass a bill to help put people back to work. Our nation's infrastructure is falling apart; roads need to be repaired, bridges need to be replaced, water lines are bursting and our sewer systems are obsolete.

It is time for Congress to stop the bickering and get to work—raise the debt ceiling, pass a meaningful jobs bill and start to do what they were elected to do; address the needs and concerns of those who placed them in office!

SOAR International Conference Scheduled

August 2014 in Las Vegas

The SOAR International Conference is scheduled for August 8-9, 2014, at the MGM Grand Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, Nev. Chapters large enough to send delegates will be notified by mail and must schedule their delegate elections in March of this year.

SOAR in ACTION
USW@Work

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BEWARE OF A CONGRESS That Wants to Simplify Taxes

By Ike Gittlen, USW Liaison to the Alliance for American Manufacturing (AAM)

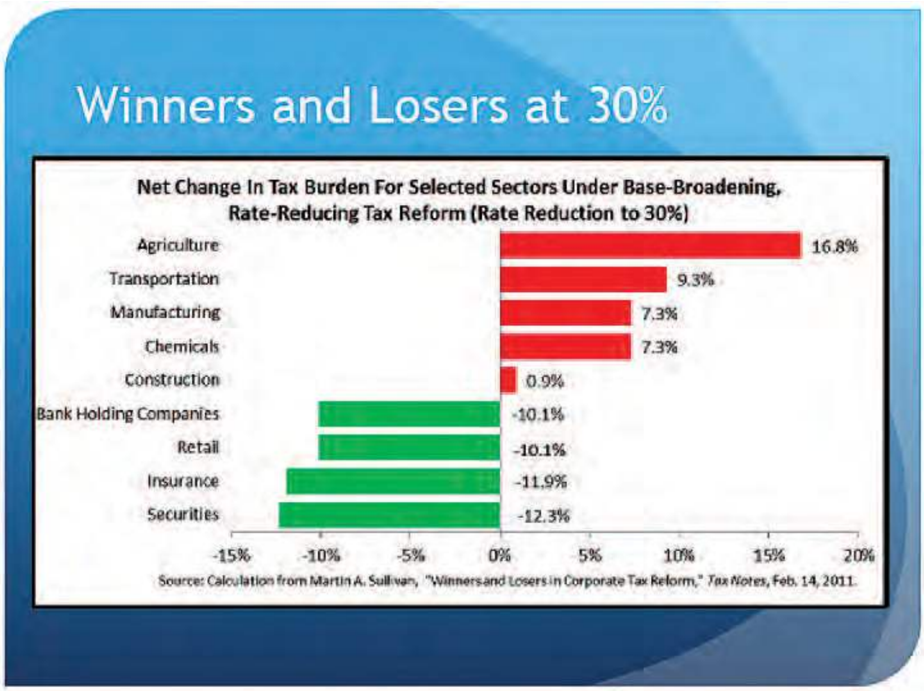
Politicians have been speechifying for decades about the complexity of our tax system and the need to simplify it. Add to that the political juice that comes from promising tax reductions and you have the latest efforts in Washington to eliminate tax "loopholes" and reduce the corporate tax burden.

At the end of last year, the Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, Max Baucus (D-Mont.), unveiled a number of "discussion drafts" that proposed changes in the corporate tax code that would bring the top tax rate down below 30 percent. Because these proposals slash longstanding incentives for investing in plants and equipment, these discussion drafts have rung alarm bells with those working to revitalize the American manufacturing sector. Similar tax reform work is going on inside the House Ways and Means Committee chaired by Dave Camp (R-Mich.). AAM believes that fundamental reform of the tax code is worth consideration—particularly if those tax reforms spur innovation and investment, and strengthen the productive sectors of our economy that create good jobs. While not perfect, the current tax code has a number of provisions that help manufacturing create good middle-class jobs. Existing provisions, which offer tax incentives when manufacturers invest in new equipment and allow them to recover the cost of these investments, take into account the unique nature of our manufacturing sector. But if in the name of "tax simplification" we eliminate those incentives, and fail to replace them with anything that provides the same or better incentives, manufacturing takes yet another wallop.

Manufacturing is vital to a revival of the American economy. We are seeing a very modest recovery in the sector, but we still haven't restored most of the 5.5 million manufacturing jobs we lost over the past decade and a half. According to some of the most respected tax analysts in the country, changes proposed by the Baucus discussion drafts could result in a net tax increase to the manufacturing sector. This, of course, would harm the overall economy and throw a cold bucket of water on that fragile manufacturing recovery. That's why AAM has begun a campaign to educate members of Congress and the public about the importance of supporting American manufacturing through the tax code.

AAM's education effort is already paying off. House and Senate members have sent letters calling for a deep analysis of the impact of any tax change proposal on the various sectors of the economy—including manufacturing. This information would provide an easy-to-understand comparison on how each sector of our economy would fare under any proposal before any votes are cast. The chart below shows the impact that eliminating tax incentives for plant and equipment investments would have on the manufacturing sector. As you can see, the productive sectors of our economy would be burdened with higher taxes while the non-producing sectors would get a windfall, and it's exactly the wrong way to do tax reform. But as we've seen, that doesn't mean we won't see this kind of bad policy if we don't stand up and make sure it doesn't gain traction.

Follow AAM's lead. Call your representative and senators. Tell them to make sure any corporate tax changes support American manufacturing. Tax policy takes a long time to gain consensus, and we have an opportunity to lay in ground rules in favor of American manufacturing before the votes are cast.



FAST TRACK TO POVE

That giant sucking sound predicted by Ross Perot commenced 20 years ago last week. It is the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) vacuuming up U.S. jobs and depositing them in Mexico. Independent presidential candidate Perot was right. NAFTA swept U.S. industry south of the border. It made Wall Street happy. It made multi-national corporations obscenely profitable. But it destroyed the lives of hundreds of thousands of American workers.

By United Steelworkers International President Leo W. Gerard
Originally Posted: 01/13/2014 in the Huffington Post

NAFTA's backers promised it would create American jobs, just as promoters of the Korean and Chinese trade arrangements said they would, and advocates of the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) deal contend it will. They were—and still are—brutally wrong. NAFTA, the Korean deal and China's entry into the World Trade Organization killed American jobs. They lowered wages. They diminished what America cherishes: opportunity. They contributed to the very ill that President Obama is crusading against: income inequality. There is no evidence the TPP would be any different. American workers need a new trade philosophy, one that protects them and puts people first, not corporations.

After 20 years, Americans know in their guts the damage NAFTA did to them, the destruction it caused to American manufacturing. There's also concrete proof. In a study titled "NAFTA at 20," released this month, Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch concludes:

"After two decades of NAFTA, the evidence is clear: the vaunted deal failed at its promises of job creation and better living standards while contributing to mass job losses, soaring income inequality, agricultural instability, corporate attacks on domestic health and environmental safeguards, and mass displacement and volatility in Mexico."

It points out that the NAFTA snake-oil salesmen at the Peterson Institute promised it would create 170,000 jobs a year. A year! Instead, it cost America at least 845,000 jobs. That is the number of manufacturing workers who were able to jump through all of the red-taped hoops necessary to receive Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) after corporations moved their jobs across the border. The study's authors believe hundreds of thousands of additional workers lost their jobs because of NAFTA but did not qualify for the federal TAA aid.

The study also notes that the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics determined that two out of every three displaced manufacturing workers who secured new jobs in 2012 did so at slashed wages, the majority at a cut of more than 20 percent.

The result is rising income inequality. It happens like this: workers lose their good-paying factory jobs and take lower-paying positions. This increases competition for low-skill, low-pay jobs that can't be offshored, such as hamburger flipping and shelf stocking. While a small number of corporate executives and wealthy shareholders profit from moving factories across borders, it forces increasing numbers of workers to vie for minimum-wage jobs. As a result, income inequality now matches the level it was during the robber baron days before the Great Depression.

A study last year by the non-partisan Economic Policy Institute (EPI) supports the Public Citizen findings. EPI determined that trade-reduced wages for workers without college educations dropped by 5.5 percent in 2011, costing the average worker $1,800. Meanwhile, trade with developing countries like China increased the wages of the smaller number of college-educated U.S. workers. The upshot is a widening gulf between Americans' earnings, particularly as more and more Americans can't afford the costs of higher education.

NAFTA actually encouraged corporations to abandon the United States. The Public Citizen report explains: "NAFTA created new privileges and protections for foreign investors that incentivized the offshoring of investment and jobs by eliminating many of the risks normally associated with moving production to low-wage countries."

What that means is that U.S. corporations contribute to the trade deficit by manufacturing in Mexico and importing their products into America. Before NAFTA, the United States had a small trade surplus with Mexico. Now it's a trade deficit. A huge one.

The Korean trade deal, which took effect nearly two years ago, is no better. Like NAFTA, its promoters said it would boost exports and create jobs. In its first year, U.S. exports to Korea fell 8.3 percent. Imports from Korea rose, increasing the trade deficit with Korea by nearly 40 percent. That cost Americans 40,000 jobs.

RTY

This is not what Americans want from trade. And yet, the United States is negotiating a NAFTA-style deal called the TPP with 11 Pacific Rim nations, including Brunei, Chile, Malaysia, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam. The negotiations are occurring in secret. Average citizens have no access to what's going on. Without significant changes, TPP will just be another American factory shuttering, dream shattering trade deal.

Of course, the corporations that stand to profit and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce support the current TPP scheme, as they did the other job-destroying trade deals. And so do corporate politicians.

Three of them—U.S. Rep. Dave Camp and Senators Orrin Hatch and Max Baucus —introduced legislation last week to speed passage of TPP— put it on the fast track. Under fast track, Congress excuses itself from its Constitutional duty to supervise international trade.

The fast track bill empowers the president to sign a secretly devised trade pact before Congress votes on it. Fast track also limits Congressional debate to 20 hours and forbids amendments.

In addition to the anniversary of NAFTA, last week was the 50th anniversary of Lyndon B. Johnson's call for a War on Poverty.

In that address to Congress, Johnson also appealed for more balanced trade, for foreign countries granted access to the American market to open their markets to American goods. That's what Americans want from trade—fairness. They know they can compete when given a level playing field.

Americans want trade deals to ensure equity. They want trade policies that increase American innovation, American manufacturing and American jobs.

They want trade policies that help America win President Obama's war on income inequality, not schemes that grant special favors to corporations at the expense of people.

Representative Jan Schakowsky, (D-Ill., 9th congressional district) standing with SOAR members and activists from the Chicago Jobs Council outside the John C. Kluczynski Federal Building downtown Chicago, called on Sen. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) to support extending unemployment benefits.

SOAR Members Rally on Behalf of the Unemployed

Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.) joined members of SOAR, Steelworkers and the Chicago Jobs Council Wednesday to call on Illinois Sen. Mark Kirk to support an extension of unemployment benefits.

The federal Emergency Unemployment Compensation program expired at the end of 2013. Congress is currently in recess, but Schakowsky said she hopes an extension will be passed next week when Congress is back in session.

"I don't understand how our Congress, the people who won't vote to extend these benefits, including our senator here in Illinois, Mark Kirk, can be so cold and leave so many people out in the cold," said Schakowsky, during a press conference outside the Kluczynski Federal Building downtown.

Bill Gibbons, SOAR executive board member, spoke on behalf of steelworkers. He said the benefits are both a moral and economic issue that affects working-class and middle-class people.

"I thank Congresswoman Schakowsky for everything that she's done on behalf of working people and the middle-class and continues to do," Gibbons said. "We call upon Sen. Kirk to get on board; we call upon the senator to join Sen. Durbin and the other politicians in Illinois to help the almost 90,000 people that need help now in Illinois."

Schakowsky said myths about the unemployed hurt the perception of the issue in Congress. "One being that somehow people would rather collect that check and stay home, I guess, and eat bonbons and watch daytime television. Nothing could be further from the truth," she said. "These are people who are struggling every day to find a job and to care for their families and just to make some semblance of a living.

Excerpts in this article taken from a piece published January 22, 2014 by Medill Reports, written by James Arkin.

A strong SOAR delegation attended the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada (CURC) Convention in Ottawa last October. Left to right: Dan McNeil, Dennis Lafrainiere, "Whipper" Lawson, Rod Bezo, Fred Girling, Ruth McNeil, Julien Dionne, Dennis Carrigan, Virginia McKenzie, Marg Duguay, Reg Duguay, Joyce Cruickshank, Ben Medernach, Lena Sutton, and Doug MacPherson. Absent from the SOAR photo, through no fault of their own, are Una MacPherson and Blake McGrath.

Congress of Union Retirees of Canada (CURC)

The Congress of Union Retirees of Canada (CURC) held their 11th Constitutional Convention in Ottawa last October.

This was the largest CURC convention with 116 registered delegates, 40 of whom were women delegates, and 20 guests and observers for a total of 136. The delegates debated and adopted some 76 resolutions; calling upon federal, provincial and territorial governments to improve the Canada Pension Plan (CPP/QPP), Old Age Security (OAS) and increase the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) immediately by 15 percent, to raise all seniors out of poverty.

Delegates also adopted many resolutions, including calling for the immediate implementation of a national pharmacare program and a living wage policy across Canada. The delegates adopted an emergency resolution calling for an open and transparent public examination of the recently announced tentative agreement of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) with the European Union.

SOAR Board Member Emeritus Dan McNeil, immediate past president of CURC, conducted the election of officers, which saw Doug MacPherson, SOAR national coordinator, elected as 2nd vice president for another term.

SOAR was well represented with 17 delegates, from British Columbia through the prairies to Ontario. All in all the delegates had an exciting and productive convention and left energized with the work ahead.

JOYCE CRUICKSHANK: *Lynn Williams Award for Service*

SOAR Vice President Harry Hynd and National Coordinator Doug MacPherson presented sister Joyce Cruickshank with the third annual Lynn Williams Award for Service at a dinner meeting of SOAR Chapter 6-80 in Kitchener, Ontario.

Joyce was nominated to receive the award by her Kitchener-Waterloo SOAR Chapter in recognition of her extraordinary community work.

Joyce became a member of USW Local 3435, and later USW Local 838, while a union counsellor with the Kitchener-Waterloo and District Labour Council Union Counselling Program. She has served on the board of the Catholic Family Counselling Centre, the board of the Waterloo Region Community Legal Services, the Employee Assistance Program Council, initiating EAP programs in various workplaces and training over 400 workers to assist workers in difficulty. She has served with distinction on the Mental Health Committee of the Kitchener-Waterloo Hospital as chair, where she was instrumental in creating a new team model for the delivery of services to the mentally ill in the community.

Since her retirement in 1998, she has served as a labour representative on the Board of Governors of the Conestoga College of Applied Arts and Technology, as well as on the Employment Insurance Board of Referees, the United Way of Kitchener-Waterloo and the Grants Committee of the Kitchener-Waterloo Community Foundation.

Joyce continues to be active in her SOAR chapter, the Waterloo Regional Council of Union Retirees (CURC) and the Ontario Federation of Union Retirees (OFUR), where she holds the elected office of secretary.

Doug MacPherson and SOAR International Vice President Harry Hynd presenting the Lynn Williams Award for Service to Joyce Cruickshank, SOAR Chapter 6-80, in Kitchener, Ont.

ROLE FOR RETIREES

By Doug MacPherson
SOAR National Coordinator

The North American labour movement has been under relentless attack for generations, but in Canada that attack is intensifying; more particularly in provinces like Saskatchewan and Ontario and from the Conservatives in our nation's capital.

There are threats that the Rand formula, (the automatic deduction and remittance of union dues) could be made voluntary, through so-called right-to-work legislation. This certainly is on the stated platform of Ontario Provincial Conservative leader Tim Hudak, who claims that this would be a job-creating strategy. All of this, while surveys of Canadians show that the vast majority of Canadians believe that unions are good for all workers and not just unionized workers. When asked about everyone in a bargaining unit paying dues, Canadians say that is only fair!

These threats are being taken seriously by the labour movement and the USW, along with all the affiliates of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC). We are actively participating in the CLC campaign, Together Fairness Works, to engage active members in conversations about the value of unions. The goal is to engage the active workforce in one-on-one conversations, three million of them across Canada.

The USW's Fairness Works efforts include posters, conversation guides and activist training to help us mobilize our members into conversations about the value of unions.

At their recent convention, the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada (CURC) adopted a resolution in support of the Fairness Works campaign. But going further, is calling on us as retirees to be part of that conversation, with our families, friends and neighbours in our communities so that they understand what is at stake if the conservatives prevail in their attack.

Recently, I was asked to give an impromptu speech at a SOAR meeting where the invited speaker had cancelled at the last minute. Having nothing prepared, I decided to talk about my experience and tie it in to these attacks on the labour movement. I believe that we all have stories and life experiences to share with our families and friends who perhaps do not understand the value of unions.

I have had many positive experiences with my union, but one in particular stands out. In fact, I can transport myself back to the very moment in 1972, to the very spot in the workshop where I was standing, reading the ratification handout on the contract renewal agreement. I can hear the noises and smell the maintenance workshop, it is still so vivid in my memory.

There were many improvements to our collective agreement in 1972, all of which I cannot remember, but three stand out clearly for me.

They were: the immediate change in the waiting period for weekly indemnity payments (sick leave pay) from eight workdays to three. This was substantial as very few workers with families could do without pay for eight days and indeed most departments had small voluntary funds handled by the union stewards to subsidize a worker for that loss of pay during the waiting period.

The change in the maximum benefit period for weekly indemnity from 26 weeks to 52 weeks, (a full year), and the announcement of a disability pension for those employees with ten or more years of service, that would provide some financial help for a worker who was unable to work because of severe illness or disease.

Now, I don't know if it was the fact that my wife had just recently given birth to our third child, or the fact that I had just purchased my first brand new home that these items had a particular impact on me, but I remember thinking that if anything happened to me, my wife and children would be taken care of in some manner, and the fact that the union had accomplished this was, I thought, quite remarkable.

Now over the years, the union has accomplished many advances sometimes beyond our wildest dreams but nothing can compare with those three in 1972. When I recounted that experience, I challenged the audience to think of their own experiences and to share them with their family and friends who may not have had direct experience with a union.

One member stood up and recalled that her father had worked at Stelco when there was no paid vacation. You could, if the employer agreed, get one week of unpaid vacation. She recounted fondly how her family would go to a beach on Lake Ontario just a few miles from home for vacation thanks to the union. Another recalled how the union fought and won the right to refuse unsafe work, and the impact that had on him and his co-workers.

Friends, as retirees we have a role to play in this campaign. Take a few moments and consider what the union meant for you and share it with those who are most dear to you. Their future security at work could depend on it.

NEWS FROM CANADA

Giving Meaning to the SOAR MANDATE

The SOAR mandate states in part, "In addition the purpose of this organization is to better the communities in which said members live…" This calls for chapters to be creative in how this constitutional article is translated into action. Chapter 3-19 in Regina, Saskatchewan, along with USW Local 5890 hosted a barbeque to raise funds to help build a home through Habitat for Humanity. Several hundred members of the public dropped by, enabling the SOAR/USW group to help a deserving family in the community get decent affordable accommodation.

Hats off to Chapter 3-19 for showing once again how SOAR as an organization makes our communities better by small acts of kindness.

Members of SOAR, Chapter 3-19 in Regina, Sask. Left to right: John Szala, Dennis Carrigan, Randy Steininger, Lyle Lasher and Al Gibbons. John and Al serve on the chapter executive board.

SOAR Members Tell Congress: *Invest in America!*

We want to make a strong statement in 2014 that we are ready for a new direction in Washington—one that builds towards our collective future by investing in America.

UNITED STEELWORKERS Rapid Response
EDUCATING • EMPOWERING • ENGAGING

Since December, Rapid Response has been encouraging locals and retirees to get involved in our latest action, which urges Congress to repair and improve our nation's infrastructure. Currently, roads and bridges are crumbling, the electrical grid is outdated and our water and other vital systems are at risk. By taking part, we can help improve the safety of our communities, our ability to compete globally, our national security and good jobs. If we ensure that we are Buying American through the use of domestically-manufactured components, we create and support even more jobs. It is a way that we build a better country to pass on to our children and our grandchildren.

We thank all SOAR chapters that have gotten involved in this effort to date. The first round of postcard deliveries will take place during the Rapid Response and Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C., this February.

For more information on the action and our other current efforts, please visit us on the web at www.uswrr.org or on our facebook page at www.facebook.com/USWRapidResponse.

Check out USW Local 1899's Rapid Response Coordinator Terry Biggs as he speaks with his local's SOAR Chapter 34-2 members on the importance of infrastructure investment.

SOAR members from Chapter 9-UR4 in District 9 who retired from Local 12L signed over 200 postcards to their U.S. Representatives.

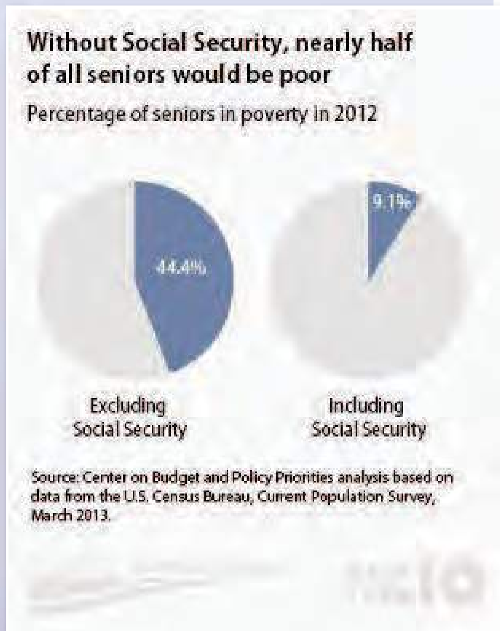
Support the Strengthening Social Security Act — S.567

Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA) introduced legislation to strengthen Social Security. It extends the Social Security Trust Fund through 2049, lifts the cap on earnings subject to the Social Security tax over a five-year period, beginning in 2014 and immediately applies the CPI-E. The proposed legislation would increase average benefits by about $65 per month or $800 per year.

The Strengthening Social Security Act of 2013 would:

- **Strengthen Benefits by Reforming the Social Security Benefit Formula:** To improve benefits for current and future Social Security beneficiaries, the Act changes the method by which the Social Security Administration calculates Social Security benefits. This change will boost benefits for all Social Security beneficiaries by approximately $65 per month, but is targeted to help those in the low and middle of the income distribution, for whom Social Security has become an ever greater share of their retirement income.

- **Ensure that Cost of Living Adjustments Adequately Reflect the Living Expenses of Retirees:** The Act changes the way the Social Security Administration calculates the Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA). To ensure that benefits better reflect cost increases facing seniors, future COLAs will be based on the Consumer Price Index for the Elderly (CPI-E). Making this change to Social Security is expected to result in higher COLAs, ensuring that seniors are able to better keep up with the rising costs of essential items, like health care.



- **Improve the Long Term Financial Condition of the Trust Fund:** Social Security is not in crisis, but does face a long-term deficit. To help extend the life of the trust fund the Act phases out the current taxable cap of $113,700 so that payroll taxes apply fairly to every dollar of wages.

Combined, these changes will increase benefits for current and future beneficiaries while making Social Security stronger for future generations by extending the life of the Trust Fund through 2049.

Call your Representative Today SAY NO to the Chained CPI

If Congress succeeds in changing the formula used to determine the annual Cost of Living Adjustments for Social Security recipients, known as the "Chained CPI", it will cut the COLA by three percent for workers retired for ten years and six percent for workers retired for twenty years. This translates to a benefit cut of $130 per year in Social Security benefits for a typical 65 year-old. By the time that senior reaches 95, the annual benefit cut will be almost $1,400.

This COLA change would also take effect immediately, impacting retirees now and in the future. These reductions disproportionately impact Social Security's oldest beneficiaries. These are often women who have outlived their other sources of income, depleted their assets, and rely on Social Security as their only lifeline to financial stability.

Claims that the current COLA is too generous are false. The COLA has averaged just two percent over the past five years with zero percent for two of those years. There is a formula that more accurately measures expenses retirees incur. The CPI-E was developed in 1987 to reflect the different spending patterns of consumer's age 62 and older. This formula acknowledges health costs have been rising much faster than other expenses and that those costs represent a much larger percentage of senior's monthly spending than is the case with other demographic groups. The CPI-E is a more accurate measure of the real-world expenses retirees' face than the current COLA formula and far more accurate than the proposed Chained CPI, which would cut projected benefits over time.

Washington Wrap

By Ken Kovack
SOAR Legislative Director
Washington, D.C.

New Year— Same Problems

In this, the first article of the New Year, I'd like to express a few wishes.

SOAR membership will SOAR. Who can deny that the work of SOAR is a benefit to all retirees? SOAR leaders and members, all volunteers, have a solid reputation in defending and enhancing the quality of life for retirees and working families. Their dedication to workplace and retirement economic security and equal justice for all is second to none.

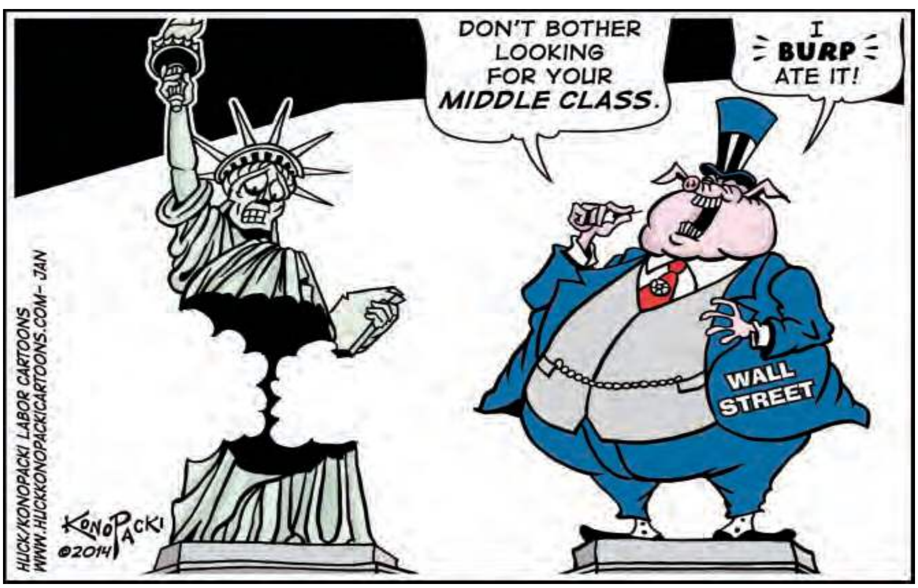
However, our membership is not where it should be. It is in all of our interest to help us grow this fine organization. It is crucial for us to succeed in order to protect what we have gained and to secure our future. The minimum annual dues of one dollar a month should not be an excuse for a retiree to join. We must do better in building our membership for the battles that lie ahead.

Added numbers brings added strength. Non-members will hopefully take a better look at the legislative issues that will harm retirees, veterans, disabled, widows and children. The issues are many; legislative proposals to reduce Social Security benefits, threats to the Medicare, Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act, food stamps, the Women, Infants & Children's (WIC) programs and Meals on Wheels, just to name a few.

Protecting these programs from a congressional ultra-conservative attack is an ongoing battle. We need to continue to grow SOAR in order to provide retirees economic security; and to protect these much needed programs and services.

Fighting the Citizens United v Supreme Court decision, I am sure everyone is familiar with the expression "Money Talks." This court decision opened the door for thousands of business and corporate treasuries to pour billions of dollars into the political process. They are allowed to fund organizations that exist solely for the purpose of enhancing the contributors own personal wealth at the expense of the general public's interest.

E PLURIBUS UNUM. Today, on each U.S. coin that you touch you can read these Latin words meaning "out of many, one." It was first recorded by St. Augustine, Confessions, Book 4, 397-398 AD. My wish for 2014 is that more retirees recognize the value of this historical Latin statement and consider it as one umbrella under which we secure our future now and for those that follow. The time to join SOAR is now.



Low Income Home Energy Assistance Down Despite the Extreme Cold

By Barbara J. Easterling

Sequestration's budget cuts last year have left hundreds of thousands of families in the cold this winter. Congress cut funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program by approximately $155 million, and total funding has decreased from $5.1 billion to $3.32 billion since 2010. Large sections of the U.S. have recently been frozen during an especially brutal winter, with a weather system known as a polar vortex bringing multiple rounds of subzero temperatures and blizzard conditions. Staying warm has become harder than ever for many Americans.

Complicating the problem, home heating costs are rising, but fewer people are getting help. The aid that is provided pays for less than it used to. 300,000 American families now struggle to heat their homes.

Sequestration cuts are not just words. They affect real people in real ways. That is why the sequestration cuts to services need to be repealed altogether, rather than reduced and repackaged, as Congress has done so far.

I wish heating assistance was an isolated problem, but it's actually part of a bigger issue. We continue to pull the rug out from under those who need help the most. As the Senate debated extending unemployment benefits for the long-term unemployed, some amendments, pushed strongly by the Republicans, would have taken away Social Security Unemployment Insurance for the low-income disabled.

Unfortunately, the pattern of cutting federal benefits for our most vulnerable citizens could be getting worse before it gets better. On the brighter side, recognizing the trend is the first step toward reversing it.

Alliance *for* Retired Americans

Barbara J. Easterling is president of the Alliance for Retired Americans. She was previously the secretary-treasurer of the Communications Workers of America. For more information, visit www.retiredamericans.org ***or call 1-800-333-7212.***

West Virginia Alliance for Retired Americans

Cedar Lakes, W.Va.—SOAR was well represented at the annual West Virginia Alliance for Retired Americans Conference held on November 21-22, 2013. Twenty nine of the eighty nine delegates were SOAR members. The theme for the meeting was "Promises Made, Promises Kept," to highlight the fight of retirees from Century Aluminum and Patriot Coal and their struggles to protect their pension and health care benefits.

The group heard from a variety of speakers. Perry Bryant from the W.Va. for Affordable Health Care; Dr. Emily Murphy and nutritionist Kristen McCartney from the WVU Institute of Labor Studies; WVU Professor Jason Kozlowski, who did a presentation on WV Labor History; and W.Va. House of Delegates Majority Whip, Mike Caputo, who is also a member of the United Mine Workers.

SOAR delegate Betty Totten; recording secretary of chapter 23-16, was elected Secretary of the state organization. In addition, SOAR members Karen Gorrell, Larry LaCorte and District 8 Executive Board Member Bob Adkins, serve as congressional district vice presidents.

W.Va.-ARA executive board left to right: President, Virginia Moles (AFSCME); Vice President, Ernest Terry (AFSME); Secretary, Betty Totten (SOAR) and Treasurer, Clyde McKnight (UMWA).

SOAR in ACTION
USW@Work

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